UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Paul Auster's Absent Father

Workings of a Theme in the Autobiographical *The Invention of Solitude* and the Fictional *Moon Palace*

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Master's Thesis
English Philology
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April 2016

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UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Tiedekunta/Osasto ✗ Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty	Laitos ✗ Institution – Department
Humanistinen Tiedekunta	Nykykieltenlaitos

Tekijä ✗ Författare – Author
Sarra Keppola

Työn nimi ✗ Arbetets titel – Title
Paul Austerin poissaoleva isä – teeman käsittely omaelämäkerrassa *Yksinäisyyden äärellä* sekä fiktioromaanissa *Kuun maisemissa* (Paul Auster's Absent Father – Workings of a Theme in the Autobiographical *The Invention of Solitude* and the Fictional *Moon Palace*)

Oppiaine ✗ Läroämne – Subject
Englantilainen Filologia

Työn laji ✗ Arbetets art – Level	Aika ✗ Datum – Month and year	Sivumäärä ✗ Sidoantal – Number of pages
Pro Gradu -tutkielma	Huhtikuu 2016	52

Pro Gradu –tutkielmassani analysoin Paul Austerin teosten avulla omaelämäkerrallisen ja fiktiivisen kerronnan eroja ja yhteneväisyyksiä. Genrejä vertaillakseni olen valinnut Austerin teoksissa toistuvan poissaolevan isän teeman, ja analysoin sen käsittelyä omaelämäkerrallisessa esikoisproosateoksessa *Yksinäisyyden äärellä* (*The Invention of Solitude*) (1982) sekä varhaisessa fiktioromaanissa *Kuun maisemissa* (*Moon Palace*) (1989).

Tutkin poissaolevan isän teemaa toisaalta itsereflektiivisenä elementtinä fiktiivisessä kerronnassa ja toisaalta selvitän, miten siitä muodostetaan narratiivi omaelämäkerrallisessa teoksessa. Väitän tutkielmassani, että Austerin teoksissa subjektiivisesta esitystavasta siirrytään objektiivisempaan suuntaan psykoanalyyttisten sekä jälkistrukturalististen teoreettisten käsitteiden ja viitekehysten avulla. Soveltamalla teemaansa teoreettisiin viitekehyksiin Auster muuttaa omakohtaiset kokemuksensa yleisempään muotoon.

Käsittelen tutkielmassani omaelämäkertaa nykyaikaisen omaelämäkertatutkimuksen pohjalta. Nykytutkimuksen mukaan omaelämäkerta nähdään identiteettiä luovana performatiivisena lajina. Nykytutkimuksen konstruktivistiset teoriat korostavat kerronnallisuutta osana identiteetin muodostamista, erotuksena niin aiemmasta klassisesta näkemyksestä, kuin myöhemmästä jälkistrukturalistisestakin.

Paul Austerin teokset edustavat tätä nykyistä näkökantaa, ja Austerin näkemystä onkin kutsuttu ”riittäväksi realismiksi” (”sufficient realism”). Tällä tarkoitetaan Austerin tapaa luoda teksteissään puitteet, jotka mahdollistavat siirtymisen jälkistrukturalismin hajanaisesta todellisuudesta todellisuuteen, jossa tietynlaiset aikaan ja kontekstiin sidonnaiset viittaavuussuhteet ovat mahdollisia ja ympäröivän maailman materiaalisuus voidaan todeta. Hän siis onnistuu yhdistämään viittaavuuden kieltävän jälkistrukturalismin realismiin, joka ei näe ongelmaa todellisuuden materiaalisuudessa. Koska Auster onnistuu näin säilyttämään mahdollisuuden itsereflektioon sekä omaelämäkerralliseen viittaavuuteen, on mielenkiintoista nähdä, miten hänen omakohtaisten kokemustensa kuvaus vuorottelee itseä reflektoivan ja fiktiivisen kerronnan välillä.

Lähestyn Austerin teosten poissaolevan isän teemaa kolmesta näkökulmasta. Ensin käsittelen poissaolevan isän aiheuttamaa traumaa ja havainnollistan, miten psykoanalyyttisen teorian mukainen käsitys traumasta on muokannut Austerin kerronnan rakennetta. Toiseksi havainnollistan, miten jälkistrukturalistinen ja psykoanalyyttinen käsitys subjektiivisuuden hajonneisuudesta on vaikuttanut Austerin keskeisten henkilöhahmojen kehittelyyn. Kolmanneksi käsittelen metaforan ja metonymian käyttöä isän poissaolon osoittamisessa strukturalistisen sekä jälkistrukturalistisen näkemysten pohjalta ja pohdin, mikä on Austerin tekstien asema suhteessa niihin.

Tutkimukseni puoltaa käsitystä Austerin tekstien ”riittävästä realismista”. Hän tiedostaa omaelämäkerrallisen viittaavuuden kuvainnollisuuden, mutta ei hylkää mahdollisuutta itsestä tai todellisuudesta puhumiseen. Tutkielmani tukee ajatusta siitä, että omaelämäkerta ja fiktio eivät ole vastakkaisia tyylilajeja, vaan osa jatkumoa, jonka ääripäissä ovat oma kokemus ja mielikuvituksen tuotokset. Erotan lajit tutkielmassani siten, että omaelämäkerrallinen narratiivi muodostetaan valikoimalla tapahtumia, vaikutelmia ja tilanteita omasta elämästä ja järjestämällä ne havainnollistamaan jotakin tiettyä ideaa. Fiktionaalinen narratiivi taas muodostetaan yleisemmäksi esitykseksi jostakin ideasta esittämällä kuvaannollinen yhtenäinen juoni, joka on havainnollistavassa yhteydessä valittuun kontekstiin. Oman kokemuksen kerronnallistaminen vie omaelämäkerrallista tarinaa välttämättä jossain määrin fiktiiviseen suuntaan, kun taas oma kokemus välttämättä jossain määrin muokkaa fiktiivistä kerrontaa ja fiktiivisen tarinan kuvainnollisuus on aina mahdollista lukea myös kirjaimellisesti.

Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords
Paul Auster, omaelämäkerta, fiktio, poissaoleva isä, trauma, psykoanalyysi, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, jälkistrukturalismi, eksistentialismi, metafora, metonymia, dekonstruktio, strukturalismi, Roman Jakobson, J. Hillis Miller

Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited
Keskustakampuksen kirjasto

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1 Introduction

In his collection of essays and interviews *The Art of Hunger* (1992), Paul Auster claims that all of his books are in a way 'the same book', "the story of [his] obsessions" (277). It is certainly clear that the same 'obsessions' recur throughout his work. If we are to see all of his books as the same, as he suggests, then the fact that his first one, *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), is labelled non-fiction; an autobiography, implies that these obsessions rise from his own experiences. Every fictional work he has written since could then be drawn back to these early meditations on his own experience. My attempt in the following pages is to see how one of these 'obsessions', or recurring themes, changes as it is moved from a self-referential genre, as I claim autobiography to be, towards a fictional representation.

Auster's work is demonstrative of the current understanding of autobiography, as it is explained by Martin Löschnigg in his article "Postclassical Narratology and the Theory of Autobiography" (2010). The constructivist theories of autobiography foreground the creative function of autobiography and revive the concept of autobiographical reference as opposed to either the classical understanding of the genre as a mimetic representation of a unified self, or the deconstructionist view of the impossibility of representation of self in language (255). Accordingly, Auster's writing can be seen as engendering "sufficient realism", as termed by Dennis Barone in his introduction to a collection of essays on Paul Auster's works, *Beyond the Red Notebook: Essays on Paul Auster* (1995), ("Introduction", 6). This is to say that he is not straightforwardly a postmodernist or poststructuralist, as he usually has been categorized. Even though he addresses the issues of poststructuralism, such as the relation between the signifier and the signified as well as the postmodern subjectivity, he does not forsake the possibility of reference to reality or the subject. Rather, as Debra Shostak points out in her article "Under the Sign of *Moon Palace*: Paul Auster and the Body in the Text" (2008), he acknowledges the contradiction between the poststructuralist reality as constructed through language and the premodern sense of materiality and "posits the conditions under which a representational mode of realism may coexist with the postmodern" (149). His method of combining the premodern with the postmodern in order to retain, or revive, the possibility of reference to self and to reality, which I will demonstrate in

my analysis, makes it interesting to see how the workings of his self-reference might change in interrelation between his autobiographical work and fiction.

The self-referential elements in Auster's works become foregrounded as recurring themes; the “obsessions” he talks about (*The Art of Hunger*, 277). One of these is the theme of the absent father, which recurs in different forms in many of his, especially earlier, works: most notably in his debut prose work *The Invention of Solitude* (1982) and an early fictional novel *Moon Palace* (1989). In this study, I will take the theme of the absent father and see how it works as autobiographical reference in his fictional work and, vice versa, how he forms a narrative out of it in his autobiographical work. I will show how the theme can be viewed in psychoanalytical and poststructuralist theoretical terms as it is transferred from personal experience, as presented in the autobiographical work to a fictional account in the novel. This approach takes into account that the move from personal experience towards a fictional account happens already in the autobiographical narrative. I propose to show that the representation of the theme moves from subjective to objective; from personal material towards a more general approach. This happens with appliance of a theoretical framework.

In the first chapter I will discuss Auster’s appliance of the theme of the absent father to the psychoanalytical concept of trauma within the structure of his two narratives. He has taken the circular structure of repetition compulsion, and applied it to the formation of his narratives in order to posit the conditions under which reference to self and to reality is possible beyond the postmodern non-referentiality. *The Invention of Solitude* is a seminal work in Auster’s oeuvre. In this and consequent works by Auster we see insistently and repeatedly the need to confirm presence and claim identity. One possible explanation for this is the initiatory trauma of his father’s absence. The absence he felt from his father led to his yearning of his father’s attention and the need to prove his own existence, first to his father and later to himself. In his memoir Auster is also attempting to write his father into existence after his sudden death – more so than he was in life, as he was always profoundly an absent figure. The Freudian concept of trauma is a convenient tool for confirming presence, as it presumes a history – a story of a body in time, and a subject that can

be referred to. The concept is put to use also in *Moon Palace*, a consequent fictional work in which he rewrites the trauma of the absent father.

In the second chapter I will discuss the theme of the absent father as Auster has applied it to the poststructuralist psychoanalytic notion of decentered subjectivity in relation to the central characters in the two works. This appliance demonstrates a critique of the poststructuralist condition as it is shown not as the norm but as a defect of character. The condition of decentered subjectivity is also linked with trauma, suggesting its harmfulness and the possibility of overcoming it. Auster's method of centering the self is part of his 'sufficient realism' as it demonstrates the possibility of a referable and centered subjectivity beyond the submission to the poststructuralist condition. *The Invention of Solitude* and *Moon Palace* both demonstrate the disintegration of identity and the reassembling of it in conjunction to the release from the repetition compulsion of trauma.

In the third chapter I will discuss Auster's use of the tropes of metaphor and metonymy in the signification of absence. Auster uses them in the signification of his father's absence in *The Invention of Solitude* and the absence of the protagonist's father figure Uncle Victor in *Moon Palace*. In structuralism the binary pair of the tropes has been seen as the two poles of language, and they have been used in structuralist taxonomy of literary styles and speech behavior. In poststructuralism this binary pair has then been deconstructed to demonstrate the figurativeness of all signification. This poststructuralist deconstruction can be seen in Auster's use of the tropes. However, Auster seems to move beyond the poststructuralist view yet again, and engages in 'sufficient realism' within his own view of the possibility of context-bound referentiality beyond the view of poststructuralism.

My method of analysis is comparative. In each analysis chapter (3-5) I will first analyze how the influence of relevant theoretical frameworks can be detected in the autobiographical text, acknowledging the step towards fictionality that is inevitable when putting one's experience into a narrative format. Then I attempt to see how the parallel workings of the theme in the fictional text might differ from those in the autobiography by analyzing the influence of the respective theoretical frameworks in the fictional text. In this way I intend to demonstrate the interrelation of the workings of the same theme in autobiography and in fiction. Before moving to the analysis I

will briefly provide the synopses of the works as relevant to the theme of the absent father.

2 Synopses: The theme of the absent father in *The Invention of Solitude* and *Moon Palace*

2.1 *The Invention of Solitude*

Auster's debut prose work, *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), is a non-fictional work in two parts. The first part, “Portrait of an Invisible Man”, is a memoir in which Auster attempts to revive the image of his recently deceased father, an absent figure even when he was alive. Samuel Auster died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 67, alone in the house the Austers had lived in before the divorce of Paul's parents. Samuel had lived in the house alone ever since the divorce, never throwing anything out or changing anything inside the house, letting everything gradually disintegrate. After his death Paul takes on the task of emptying the house of his father's possessions and he uses these artefacts in trying to assemble the essence of his father's persona. While doing this, Auster also uncovers a sixty-year-old family mystery he has learned about only quite recently: his grandmother had murdered his grandfather when his father had been only seven years old and his father had witnessed the murder.

The second part, “The Book of Memory” is an active working through of the trauma Paul Auster feels he has inherited from his father. The writing of the second part takes place in the winter after his father's death. Auster refers to himself in third person as ‘A.’ throughout the second part, as he proceeds to define his identity and confirm presence and subjectivity. This he does by attempting to redefine solitude in a more positive way than his father did, through creativity and memory. “The Book of Memory” recounts a period of inner turmoil for ‘A.’. He writes the text in a small, ascetic room in 6 Varick Street in Manhattan after A. has divorced his wife. He recounts events from the previous summer when A.’s maternal grandfather was slowly dying, and A. was going through the painful separation from his wife and two-year-old son. The second part also displays musings about certain stories, figures and notions that Auster uses to connect himself to the world.

The Invention of Solitude can be seen as a seminal work, one that all his subsequent works can be traced back to. It is, however, essential to note the shift from self-reference towards fiction to avoid the danger of mistaking the views of Auster's characters' as those of the author. Also, it is central to acknowledge that the poststructuralist as well as the current constructivist view on autobiography consider it to be a construction of identity rather than a mimetic representation of self. It is important to see *The Invention of Solitude* as a creation of art, a chosen and invented mythology, as Dennis Barone suggests ("Introduction", 14). Especially the second part of the book is already taking a further step towards fictional narrative, as it is filled with anecdotes and little stories and also as it is constructed not so much as a straightforward memoir, but as a metafictional text about the writing of the text itself.

2.2 *Moon Palace*

Moon Palace (1989) is Auster's fifth fictional novel. It is a story of Marco Stanley Fogg, an orphan born illegitimately, whose mother has died in a car accident when he was eleven. It is written in a form of a memoir in which Marco Fogg recounts his life as a young man. In the beginning he has no way of knowing who his father was. After his mother's death he is raised by his eccentric uncle Victor and eventually goes to Columbia University in New York. After Uncle Victor dies in the beginning of the novel, Marco experiences a gradual disintegration of identity. He goes through a period of near insanity as he loses all of his possessions and winds up homeless, living in Central Park. He is rescued by two of his close friends who nurse him back to health.

He then becomes the live-in companion of an eccentric elderly man with a great fortune named Effing, who is in a wheelchair and is apparently blind. Effing assigns Marco to the job of writing his obituary from his account. He recounts to Marco his life as the famous painter Julian Barber in New York and how he experienced a traumatic disintegration of identity, similar to that of Fogg, in the desert in Utah. After deciding never to return home nor to his wife, he lives in a cave he finds in the desert. He then gradually succeeds in forming a new identity for himself in the solitude of the cave by means of art and self-expression. He journeys to San Francisco and starts a new life as Thomas Effing. Later stages of his life leave him paraplegic, living as an eccentric man of great fortune in New York. He also tells

Marco he has found out he has a son named Solomon Barber, whom he has not known about until late in his life. He has followed the life of his son from afar but never contacted him. Effing dies, and Marco moves in with his girlfriend Kitty Wu.

Marco searches and finds Solomon Barber and they start meeting casually. Marco eventually tells Solomon about his father Thomas Effing. Solomon in turn by chance figures out that Marco is his son that he has not known about, but does not tell this to Marco. After Kitty Wu has become pregnant and has had an abortion that Marco did not want her to have he moves in with Solomon. As a way to pull Marco away from his depression Solomon suggests they go and try to find the cave in which Effing had lived in the desert in Utah. Along the journey they first visit the graves of Marco's mother and Uncle Victor. In the graveyard it is revealed that Solomon is Marco's father and, in a moment of frantic emotion, Marco thrusts Solomon who stumbles and falls into an open grave descending into coma. He wakes up in hospital and spends the next two months there, telling Marco his story which is marked by the trauma of his absent father. Solomon dies and consequently Marco decides to continue the westbound journey to find the cave of Effing, now discovered to be his grandfather. Marco finds the cave, but it has been covered by a lake. His car gets stolen and he continues westward by foot. After three months of hiking, he reaches the Pacific Ocean and experiences a moment of self-realization and is finally released from the disintegration of his identity and the trauma he now realizes the absence of father has bestowed upon him.

3 Trauma, Repetition Compulsion and the Uncanny

3.1 Introduction: Trauma as initiator to narrative

I have now briefly shown how the theme of the absent father is displayed in *The Invention of Solitude* and *Moon Palace*. In the following section I will demonstrate how Auster has moved from personal experience towards a fictional account of the theme by applying the Freudian concepts of trauma, repetition compulsion and the uncanny to the structure of his narratives. I will first explain how Auster uses the notion of trauma as a tool to initiate narrative.

A central force motivating Auster's works in general, as well as the two works I will be analyzing, is the desire to form subjectivity; to confirm presence. This is part of

the "sufficient realism" Dennis Barone refers to when writing about Auster's prose ("Introduction", 6). Namely, Auster acknowledges the poststructuralist condition of the linguistic construction of reality, but then moves on to posit the conditions under which reference to self and to reality is possible (Debra Shostak: "Under the Sign of *Moon Palace*"). Auster's desire to confirm subjectivity is obvious as the initializing motivation for the writing of the second part of *Invention*, but it can also be seen in the repeating pattern of disintegration and reassembling of identity apparent in *Moon Palace*.

Narrative itself, for Auster, is the result of representational materialism rather than a purely linguistic construction. Debra Shostak uses Auster's poem "White Nights" to demonstrate the "empirical faith", that Auster himself has said (*Art of Hunger*, 103) is the starting point of writing ("Under the Sign", 151-152). Shostak's demonstration reads as follows. In order to form a narrative an empirical *a priori* world must be presumed, so as to form "a story of a body in time" (152). In addition, some knowledge of that world must be presumed, so it can be referred to. For Auster, the vehicle to produce a possibility for reference – a body aware of its being, is trauma and its repetitions. Trauma, as Shostak puts it: "inherently challenges both the possibility of representation (the mimetic charge, to speak the unspeakable) and the postmodern premise of nonreferentiality. Whether manifested as loss, injury, or abjection, trauma insists on a presence, an 'out there' that must be narrated so as to free the subject from repetition." (152). Trauma, paradoxically, at the same time refuses or denies the representation of history – an *a priori* world, and presumes the presence of such history, from which it stems.

The initiatory trauma for both *The Invention of Solitude* and *Moon Palace* is the absence of the father. These are not the only narratives by Auster that are initiated by a trauma. Others include for example *City of Glass* (1985), which initiates from the protagonist's loss of his wife and son through death, echoing Auster's divorce and fear of losing his son because of it, a matter he addresses in *The Invention of Solitude*. The same loss of wife and two sons through death prompts the narrative of David Zimmer in *The Book of Illusions* (2002), just to name a few. Before moving on to analyze how the structure of the two works by Auster have been formed in accordance to the circular structure of repetition compulsion, I will explain the

Freudian notions of trauma, repetition compulsion and the uncanny, and relate them to Auster's texts.

3.2 Freud's concepts of trauma, repetition compulsion and the uncanny

3.2.1 Trauma and abreaction

Freud revised his concept of trauma throughout his career[1]. Starting from his early work with collaborator Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), he used the term *trauma* (Greek for wound) to characterize the nature of the unpleasant memories that hysterics suffer from – the source of their painful reminiscences. He concluded that these psychical reminiscences create physical symptoms. According to Freud, the traumatic memories are repressed from consciousness and remain an active unconscious force motivating behavior. In Auster's works this idea is visible in the strange behavior the protagonists recognize in themselves. In 3.3.1 and 3.4.1. I will demonstrate how Paul Auster in *Invention* as well as Marco Fogg in *Moon Palace* detect strange reactions in themselves to certain events but are at the time unaware of what is causing them.

Since the traumatic memories are repressed (i.e. cannot be remembered), they cannot be expressed or left behind normally and the symptoms they cause will disappear only if *abreaction* occurs. Abreaction is the process of releasing a repressed emotion about a forgotten event by reliving it and gaining consciousness about it. For the

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[1] The survey on trauma theory in this section is derived from the following sources:
Breuer, Josef and Freud, Sigmund. *Studies on Hysteria*. 1895. Ed. James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 1957.
Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience : trauma, narrative, and history*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996
Dilman, Ilham. *Freud and the Mind.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1984.
Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. 1920. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Bantam, 1959.
---. *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis.* 1916-17 (1915-17). Trans. James Strachey, 1963. London: Penguin Books, 1991(1973).
---. "The Uncanny." 1919. In *On Creativity and the Unconscious: Papers on the Psychology of Art, Literature, Love, Religion*. New York: Harper and Row, 1958. 122-161.
La Capra, Dominick. "Trauma, Absence, Loss." 1999. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. 43-85.
Leahey, Thomas Hardy. *A History of Psychology: Main Currents in Psychological Thought.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000. 282-324.

analysis of this chapter it is relevant to recognize that to reach abreaction, the traumatized subject needs to go back in time and gain consciousness of the original traumatic event that has caused the trauma. I will later show how in Auster's narratives abreaction represents the end to the narrative structured in accordance to the repetitive circular pattern of trauma. I will argue that in Auster's works abreaction ties to the idea of centering the self, which I will discuss in chapter 4.

3.2.2 Repetition Compulsion

As he was studying obsessive neurosis, Freud came across the tendency of the neurotics to repeat certain patterns of behavior. He inferred that neurotics are stuck in a sort of ignorance: something prevents them from knowing the cause of their misery. The actions of a neurotic do not make sense in the here-and-now but instead refer to the past and only make sense in the present as a need to repeat something. Freud concluded that the neurotic repeats instead of remembering. This notion can be taken to demonstrate how the narrative of repetition compulsion moves in repetitive circles out of time rather than in a linear manner through time. Debra Shostak explains in her article about repetition compulsion in *Moon Palace* how in the state of this neurosis the traumatized subject exists "outside of time, confined to the potentially infinite repetition of an unspeakable and unspoken traumatic event" ("Under the Sign", 150). Auster's two narratives consist of repetitions of the loss of a father in some form or another. These circular repetitions are marked by strange reactions on the part of the traumatized protagonists. The repetitive events refer to the subjects' original repressed feelings of abandonment they felt as children due to their absent fathers. Instead of acknowledging the importance of the lack of father in their lives, the subjects suffer from feelings of disintegration and externality. I will demonstrate in my analysis how Auster's traumatized characters also suffer from the experience of timelessness that links to repetition compulsion.

In addition to the compulsive need to repeat a certain pattern of behavior, Freud noticed that some patients, such as those suffering from "shell-shock" (later diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder), had a tendency to relive traumatic situations either on purpose (e.g. in a dream) or in a manner that appears to be somehow fatal. Cathy Caruth outlines Freud's notion of trauma and repetition compulsion, as described in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in her book *Unclaimed Experience : trauma, narrative, and history* (1996):

> Perplexed by the terrifyingly literal nightmares of battlefield survivors and the repetitive reenactments of people who have experienced painful events, Freud wonders at the peculiar and sometimes uncanny way in which catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through them. (1)

As Caruth explains, the neurotic repeats the experience of trauma, unknowingly and seemingly by chance, against his will. The repetition emerges as "the unwitting reenactment of an event that one simply cannot leave behind", (*Unclaimed* Experience, 2). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud suggests that an event that causes trauma is experienced too soon and unexpectedly to be fully understood and hence remains in the unconscious until it imposes itself again repeatedly. Normally anxiety prepares a person to expect danger but sometimes the psyche suffers a shock for which it was not prepared. Repetition compulsion creates retrospective anxiety in the psyche by reliving the painful memory. (Sigmund Freud: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*). In both works by Auster, the named anxiety is passed on to the protagonists from earlier generations. In 3.3.2 and 3.4.2 I will demonstrate how in both works the original traumatic events that have caused the reenactments of absence can be found only by following the paternal lineage of the protagonists. In *Moon Palace* especially, the traumatic events seem to repeat themselves by chance and be surrounded by the feeling of fatality.

3.2.3 The Uncanny

The peculiar feeling of fatality in the repetition of a catastrophic event in the life of a trauma victim links to the sense of *uncanny*. This notion, elaborated by Freud in his essay *The Uncanny* (1919), refers to a sense of strangeness in something that feels recognizable or familiar. The word in German, *unheimlich,* means something familiar turned unfamiliar but also the opposite of its base word *heimlich*, which means concealed or hidden. As such this feeling reminds us unconsciously of our repressed impulses, the unveiling of which is rejected by us, and that is why the object of the feeling of uncanny is often rejected.

Auster discusses the notion of the uncanny in the second part, "The Book of Memory", of *The Invention of Solitude* as he contemplates whether there is meaning in the link between events that seem to correlate in some way (159-160). He considers his own process of writing and recognizes his willingness to accept Freud's argument about the way childhood memories come back to "haunt" the present in the

form of uncanny experiences. Auster talks about 'A.', as he refers to himself in third person throughout "The Book of Memory": "All the coincidences that seem to have been multiplying around him, then, are somehow connected with a memory of his childhood ... He is remembering his childhood, and it has appeared to him in the present in the form of these experiences" (160). Auster thus places his own experiences within the framework of Freud's theories on trauma. The personal relevance of Freud's theories to Auster's own experiences finds literary representation in the autobiographical *The Invention of Solitude* as well as the fictional *Moon Palace*.

3.3 Repetition compulsion as narrative structure in *The Invention of Solitude*

The structure of repetition compulsion can already be seen in the seminal autobiographical work *The Invention of Solitude,* structuring the narrative of Auster's account of his own experience. The fragmented narrative of Auster's memoir is made up of the repetitions of the trauma of the absent father. In the first part of the novel Auster is trying to come to terms with the sudden death of his father, who had already been an absent figure in life. He also contemplates the reasons for his father's behavior and follows the narrative back in time to the origins of his and his father's traumas. In the second part of the novel he expresses foremost his fear of losing his own son, namely becoming an absent father himself, as his marriage is coming to an end. He also recounts events after his father's death in the previous summer, when he was taking care of his maternal grandfather who was slowly dying in hospital. He also reminisces about 'S.', an important father figure he had in Paris when he was 18 years old. These foregrounded events and memories are surrounded by curious or somewhat exaggerated reactions.

3.3.1 Paul Auster's repetitive symptoms in *The Invention of Solitude*

Auster as the narrator detects strange behavior in himself after his father's death in the beginning of *Invention*. He is in a curious hurry to write about his father immediately, which seems to suggest an irrational fear of losing his father again, now that his general absence has turned into actual loss. Dominick LaCapra in his essay "Trauma, Absence, Loss" (1999) differentiates between absence and loss and links

the blurring of the distinction between the two in post-traumatic situations with the blurring between the distinctions of then and now: "in post-traumatic situations in which one relives (or acts out) the past, distinctions tend to collapse" ("Trauma, Absence, Loss", 46). He argues, moreover, that "the very ability to make the distinction between absence and loss (as well as to recognize its problematic nature) is one aspect of a complex process of working through" (47). This, I feel, is precisely the nature of Auster's traumatic state, as represented in *Invention*. Absence is not an event, as LaCapra explains, but exists on a "transhistorical level" and thus, I would argue, it links to the timelessness experienced in a traumatic state of repetition compulsion. Loss, by contrast, is situated on a historical level and demands tenses and a narrative. As Auster loses his father, who has been 'absent' his whole life, he needs to differentiate between absence and loss, and to establish the possibility of reference and a history in order to work through the loss as well as the trauma of the absent father. This he attempts to do by putting his experience in the form of a narrative.

A consequent occasion that yields an unexpected reaction from 'A.', Auster's character in the second part, is when his son is at the hospital at a time when A.'s marriage is falling apart. His two-year-old son had had pneumonia with asthmatic complications and was put in a crib covered by a plastic tent in the hospital and had to remain there for three days and nights with adrenalin dripped into his veins (*Invention*, 114-115). This was, of course, exhausting for the parents who took turns to sit beside the boy's crib trying to calm him down. The parents must have both been equally worried about the boy's wellbeing, but also equally exhausted by him. Yet, as A.'s wife expresses her exhaustion, A. turns against her and "[storms] out of the room and [goes] to his son's bedside" (115). This is an extreme reaction, which is not completely explained by the collapsing of their marriage, since A. himself had been hoping for reconciliation between the two and working towards it. The reaction is motivated by his fear of losing his son and it seems to be enforced by the unconscious link between the fear of losing his son and the trauma of the absent father.

Yet another example of an instance that seems to link to Auster's trauma of the absent father has to do with 'S.', an important father figure he had stayed in touch

with for years. Auster addresses A.'s curious reluctance to look him up when he visits Paris in the November after the year his father and grandfather had died and his marriage collapsed: "startling to him, however, was that when he finally went back to Paris (November 1979), after an absence of more than five years, he failed to look up S. And this in spite of the fact he had fully intended to do so" (99). This reluctance seems to be motivated by the unconscious. Auster recognizes himself that "This reluctance … was a product of fear" and that "He was afraid that S. was dead" (99). This irrational fear is, just like his fear of losing his son, linked to the trauma of the absent father. The curiousness of these unexpected reactions imply an unconscious motivator, namely the repressed memories that are linked to these events and surrounded by the experience of the uncanny.

3.3.2 The origin of the trauma and its inheritance

As Auster is trying to work out the reasons for his father's absence, he comes across an old family tragedy that seems to explain his father's behavior: "My grandmother murdered my grandfather … precisely sixty years before my father died, his mother shot and killed his father in the kitchen of their house … A boy cannot live through this kind of thing without being affected by it as a man" (37-38). The story of Auster's paternal grandfather's death makes sense as the origin of the trauma that has been passed on to Paul, but this would not be the case without the narrative of the trauma itself. This is how Auster's act of autobiographical writing posits the conditions under which reference to reality is possible: if not for the forming of a narrative of the trauma, abreaction could not be achieved as it demands an *a priori* world "out there" that can be referred to as the origin of the trauma. Without the origin, the trauma itself and hence the narrative itself, would not exist.

Auster as narrator recognizes his own reluctance to write about the event: "Now that the time has come to write about [the newspaper articles about the case], I am surprised to find myself doing everything I can to put it off. … Even now, as I write about my reluctance to write, I find myself impossibly restless" (37). Trauma, and the narrative based on it, are kept up by not knowing the event that has caused them. According to Cathy Caruth, not knowing is essential to the experience of trauma: "trauma is not locatable in the ... original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way it was precisely *not known* in the

first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on" (*Unclaimed Experience,* 4). To find a beginning to the story of circular repetitions means to break from the circularity and thus come to an end of the story at some point. The narrative is motivated by contrasting desires to know and not to know. If one's identity has been defined by the trauma and by not knowing its origin, the revelation of the origin threatens the identity and is suppressed.

As Auster's identity that has been defined by trauma is deconstructed by the unravelling of the trauma to a narrative form, it needs to be reconstructed in order to end the circular narrative. This is how the autobiography works as an act of identity formation for Auster. By forming a narrative of the trauma and its repetitions, Auster posits the conditions under which reference to reality is possible and even compulsory, so that the story can be freed from circular repetition. Along with the recognition of the trauma and its stem Auster can find a way to reach abreaction and free his own son of the threatening inheritance of the trauma. I will analyze his method of doing this in a further section about centering of the self in *Invention* (section 4.3).

3.4 Repetition compulsion as narrative structure in *Moon Palace*

The narrative of the fictional novel *Moon Palace* is similarly structured according to the circular repetitions of the initial trauma and just as in *Invention*, the trauma in the novel is passed on from generation to generation. In the novel, the narrative is even more in accordance with the theoretical notion of trauma, and the circularity of the narrative is more foregrounded. Peter Brooks, as quoted by Debra Shostak, states about the narrative of repetition compulsion that the repetitions "[confound] the movement forward to the end with a movement back to origins" (152). The repetitions refer to an unknown mystery in the past and *Moon Palace* contains two mirroring plots of quests back to origins: Marco Fogg's unconscious drive to find his father, Solomon Barber, who in turn is seeking knowledge of his own father, Julian Barber/Thomas Effing. Not knowing is an essential element in Marco's trauma, too. Marco is unconsciously at the same time driven by the contrasting desires to know and not to know, similarly to Paul's experience as described in *Invention*. Marco's desire to know is suppressed at first, which keeps up the psychological timelessness of the traumatic condition and ensures the continuation of the repetitive narrative.

The traumatized protagonist Marco Fogg does not, until the very end of the novel, realize the importance of the initial trauma to his life. Only after finding his father, does he begin to realize how defining this absence has been in his story. After hearing the account of Solomon Barber's and his mother's romance, he still finds it hard to accept that he has found his father:

> As long as a sliver of skepticism remained, I would not have to admit that anything had happened. This was an unexpected response, but looking back on it now, I feel that it makes a peculiar kind of sense. For twenty-four years, I had lived with an unanswerable question, and little by little I had come to embrace that enigma as the central fact about myself. (286)

This reluctance mirrors that of A.'s in *Invention*. Just like A., Marco seems to be motivated by an unconscious wish not to know the origin of his trauma as it has defined his identity for so long. In Freudian terms it could be stated that Fogg is still repressing the traumatic memory of the absence of his father from his consciousness. Unconsciously he feels guilt about his anger towards his absent-until-now father, and since he cannot express this anger, it manifests as strange behavior. The guilt he feels about the anger towards his father is foregrounded by the fact that a burst of that anger has gotten his father into hospital and eventually leads to his death. In the cemetery where Marco finds out that Solomon thinks he is Marco's father, Marco's initial feelings upon realizing the truth are "nothing but anger, a demonic surge of nausea and disgust" (284). He shoves Solomon and screams at him in rage "like a madman" (284), resulting in Solomon falling into an open grave. Symbolically, I would argue, Marco's guilt about the anger he feels towards his father is linked to the Freudian idea of the Oedipus Complex: the son's wish to murder his father and the repressed guilt that follows this wish. These reactions that follow the coming to light of the answer to the "unanswerable question" in Marco's life suggest the traumatic nature of the absence of the father in his life.

3.4.1 Marco Fogg's repetitive symptoms in *Moon Palace*

The traumatized condition of Marco Fogg can be seen in the strange ways the trauma's repetitions affect his behavior throughout the narrative of the novel. Marco experiences a series of losses that repeat the initial, traumatic absence of the father after Marco's conception. First is the death of his mother at age eleven that repeats the loss of a parent. Second is the death of his surrogate father Uncle Victor,

repeating in a concretizing way the loss of father. Next is the death of Marco's employer, Thomas Effing, who later turns out to be his grandfather. Then comes the loss of his own child in an abortion that he is reluctant to support. Finally, we have the loss of his newly-found real father, Solomon Barber. Some of these losses are marked by an uncanny feeling and some of them result in strange behavior that Marco cannot explain at the time but only in retrospect as a first-person narrator looking back on his life.

The death of his mother is marked as significant in that it makes it impossible for Marco to find out the identity of his father since his mother never told anyone. It also seems to make fatality a prominent feature of Marco's life: Marco relates himself, sarcastically, to a tradition of heroic outcast orphans: "I ... sobb[ed] myself to sleep at night like some pathetic orphan hero in a nineteenth-century novel" (4). Remarkably, Marco attaches himself much more closely to his surrogate-parent, his uncle Victor. He only has vague memories of his mother, but Uncle Victor becomes the most important figure in his life. This would suggest that Marco has been yearning for a father-figure all along and is glad to find one in Uncle Victor. He says about his uncle's death: "This death was a terrible blow for me; in many ways it was the worst blow I had ever had. Not only was Uncle Victor the person I had loved most in the world, he was my only relative, my one link to something larger than myself. Without him I felt bereft, utterly scorched by fate" (2). From this confession it can be seen that Marco is longing for knowledge of genealogy in order to feel at place in the world. An unconscious wish to find his paternal origin is embedded in his grief for his last relative.

Uncle Victor's death sets Marco off the track and whirls him into a state of neurosis, which is the starting point of the narrative. He wears his uncle's suit in an attempt to embody this paternal figure he has lost. He starts to read through boxes of books that Uncle Victor gave him, the only things that constitute his living space, since he has used them for furniture. Little by little everything around him evaporates as he sells the books after reading them as his only source for money. He starves himself and after the money runs out he finds himself on the streets of New York. He attempts to lose himself in the asceticism of starving himself and sleeping outside, but cannot escape the realities of his body: his hunger does not go away by attempting to eat as little as possible and he falls ill as he does not have a shelter for the weather. This

episode of neuroticism displays elements of trauma. Marco loses his sense of time: “I had lost the ability to think ahead, and no matter how hard I tried to imagine the future, I could not see it, I could not see anything at all. The only future that had ever belonged to me was the present I was living in now” (40). Marco starts to exist outside of time as a traumatized subject in the state of neurosis. There is also an instant when Marco acts out his unwillingness to gain knowledge. As he lies in his apartment in a state of near delirium resulting from his starvation and his neurotic state, he twice hears knocking on his door and instead of opening the door he engages in several hours of pondering about the qualities of the knockings. Retrospectively, his narrator voice expresses acknowledgement of the absurdness in his behavior: “In all that time, however, it did not occur to me to ask who those people might have been. Even more to the point, I did not make any effort to understand why I did not want to know” (43). In retrospect he seems to have recognized his own repression of knowledge.

The death of Marco’s employer, Thomas Effing is another instance that repeats the loss of a father figure (although not as prominent as Uncle Victor). At the time of the death, Marco is unaware of the fact that Effing is his grandfather, and so is Effing. Effing dies slowly of a self-afflicted pneumonia and the storyline seems to somewhat echo the death of Auster’s own maternal grandfather, as described in *Invention*. In both cases the slow death does not affect the protagonist in the same way as other, more sudden repetitions of the initial trauma, but is nevertheless connected to the larger schemes as further repetitions of the circular narrative. Yet another repetition that in some way echoes Auster’s own experience as described in *Invention*, is the loss of the protagonist’s own child. In *Invention* this loss is only a prominent fear that shadows the second part of the novel, but in *Moon Palace* Auster seems to act out this fear by making the protagonist actually lose his unborn child in abortion. Marco does not support the abortion, but has no say in it since his girlfriend Kitty makes the decision for herself. The act becomes a turning point in their relationship and in the story as well since it is a repeating instance of disintegration of Marco’s identity, suggesting the continuing of the trauma instead of abreaction: Marco still needs to identify his trauma in order to move on with his life. Coincidentally, the instance also moves Marco closer to Solomon Barber leading him to recognition of and eventual release from the trauma and repetition compulsion. The final repetition of the trauma

of the absent father then is the death of his newly found father, Solomon Barber. The actual loss of his unintentionally absent father sets Marco, literally as well as figuratively, on the road to recovery and leads to abreaction in the form of the reconstruction of identity and the centering of the self in relation to outer world. I will discuss Marco's abreactive centering of the self in a following section about decentered subjectivities in *Moon Palace* (section 4.4).

3.4.2 The origin of the trauma and its inheritance

The central trauma in *Moon Palace* repeats itself from generation to generation. This repetition happens unbeknownst to the characters, since the subjects are unaware of the stories of their predecessors and their relations to each other. All of the three characters' traumatic experiences have to do with the disintegration of identity and the condition of nonreferentiality, which in the two latter repetitions are due to the trauma of the absent father, unwittingly inflicted but defining in their prominence. The starting point to the trauma that Marco has inherited is located in the moment when his grandfather Julian Barber suffers a traumatic experience in the desert: the neglect by their guide and the long, suffering death of his friend and travel partner, Edward Byrne, due to an accident. This traumatic event results in a state of neurosis. Julian decides to stay in the cave he finds in the desert, not return home and consequently changes his identity to Thomas Effing. This decision results in his son Solomon's trauma concerning his absent father, as he grows up thinking his father has died tragically in the desert. Solomon, just as unwittingly as his father, passes the same trauma over to his son, Marco.

The trauma finds its abreaction only after these questions of origin and paternity are resolved and the family lineage has been discovered. Family history, from which the trauma stems, is piece by piece put into narrative order by Marco and this creates a possibility for reference; the unconscious need becomes conscious. The events described by Marco as the narrator in the fictional autobiography are important, but the autobiographical form of the narrative of the novel is part of the abreaction as well. Just as the writing of *Invention* is an identity-constructing act for Auster, so the writing of the autobiography by the fictional Marco Fogg described in *Moon Palace* is part of the identity construction necessary for abreaction for Marco. He puts the

story of his family history in narrative order, but he also has to do the same to the story of his own experience.

As mentioned earlier, Debra Shostak has described the traumatic state of repetition compulsion as a condition where "[the] subject exists outside of time, confined to the potentially infinite repetition of an unspeakable and unspoken traumatic event" ("Under the Sign", 150). This is how repetition compulsion can also be linked (and in Shostak's article is indeed linked) with the postmodern condition of the circularity of language: the repetition of events links with the impossibility of reference in the postmodern state of fleeting meaning that keeps explaining words with other words in endless regression and confining reality to a world of discourse. Trauma at first sets the subject out of time and refuses referentiality but then insists on a possibility of reference as it insists on presence and a narratable story in order to reach abreaction. Thus it establishes time and the body as the real instead of linguistic constructions, and so the possibility of reference and reality is linked with release from compulsive repetition. ("Under the Sign", 149-150). A tool for Auster to reach abreaction within the story is the act writing the story itself. As Marco unravels the history of the trauma he has inherited and the unknown becomes known, he comes to feel the need to find the cave where Julian Barber resided in the desert: the material origin of the condition of nonreferentiality that connects to the trauma. In poststructuralist terms he needs to acknowledge the possibility of referentiality by actually witnessing the materiality of the signified: this is the moment where the analogy of trauma opens up the possibility for reference and the real. When Marco finally finds the place, it is underwater, unattainable, but as Marco states: "the act of looking for it would be sufficient in itself, an act to annihilate all others", (294). The fact that he is willing to accept the possibility of reference suffices and sets Marco on the path for recovery.

3.5 Conclusions

The narratives of *The Invention of Solitude* and *Moon Palace*, both structured according to repetition compulsion, differ from each other in that the autobiography is a collection of events connected with each other in relation to the notion of trauma, whereas the novel is structured as a coherent storyline that resembles the same notion in a more general way. The personal experience of Auster, as represented in his

autobiographical work, is turned into a more fictional account in his novel by putting it into a form that is more universal and in accordance to a theoretical notion, namely Freud's notion of trauma. This can be demonstrated with more detail by an example of an experience described in *The Invention of Solitude* that seems to be reflected in fictional form in *Moon Palace.* As the second part of the memoir opens, we find A. in a state that is resembled in Fogg's state of neurosis after his uncle's death in *Moon Palace* as described in 3.4.1.

In "Book of Memory" A. is living alone in an isolated room far above Manhattan in very ascetic conditions. He has minimum amount of furniture, there is no toilet in his room and the elevator is out of service. He avoids leaving the room, as it is on the top floor, because he finds it "disheartening to exhaust himself so thoroughly only to return to such bleakness" (81). His surroundings seem to be reflected later in the fictional account of Marco Fogg's living space in *Moon Palace*. A.'s condition is in a sharp contrast to that of the first part of the book, written about the time he spent taking care of the house and the objects his father had left behind. In the first part Auster is active, while in the second part he is passive and pensive. Auster notes the sense of timelessness A. is in, and finds the winter solstice reflects this feeling: "the darkest time of the year. No sooner has he woken up in the morning than he feels the day beginning to slip away from him. There is … no sense of time unfolding", (82). The sense of timelessness links his state to trauma and is another thing that finds a fictional account in Marco Fogg's experience in *Moon Palace*.

In the autobiographical representation of this experience, the mood is amplified by the outer conditions as much as the inner turmoil he is in. Whereas in the fictional account of the event in *Moon Palace* the neurotic state of Marco after the death of his uncle emanates more directly from a psychological source. Also, the dark mood A. has in the beginning of the second part seems to be a result of multiple losses suffered in a short time, beginning with the death of his father, continuing with the death of his maternal grandfather and the end of his marriage. As this experience is transferred into a story form in *Moon Palace*, the result is a neurotic state after a certain significant event in the protagonist life, namely the death of his uncle as a significant repetition of the initial trauma. As such it reflects the Freudian notion of trauma more distinctly. The personal experience reflected in an autobiographical

work is thus presented more distinctly in accordance with a theoretical notion as it moves towards a fictional account.

4 Decentered Subjectivity

4.1 The difference of solitudes: the destructive and the creative

As I have already posited, one of Auster's main preoccupations in *The Invention of Solitude* as well as other works, is to confirm presence and claim identity. What occurs in *Invention* can be described as centering the self. Auster begins by stating his father as a traumatic subject unable to overcome his neurotic state. The oxymoronic portrait of his father in the first part of the book, "Portrait of an Invisible Man", is just that: a paradoxical attempt to portray what cannot be seen; to center the persona of his father, who is described as an epitome of the poststructuralist notion of decentered subjectivity. Out of this paradox then, on the second part of the book, "The Book of Memory", arises the possibility for Auster to differentiate from his father by centering himself in relation to others through memory and thus break free from the repetition compulsion of the inherited trauma.

The possibility for a centered self through memory is based on Auster's elaboration on two sides of solitude: a destructive, isolating one, and one that connects to others and fosters creativity. The title of the book gets its meaning from this differentiation Auster makes between himself and his father. He uses the theme of solitude as a link between the two parts of the book. Solitude, as John D. Barbour points out in his essay about *Invention*, is "both the cause of estrangement between Auster and his father and a common experience that links them" (19). Auster claims in *Invention*, however, that the nature of the solitude experienced by his father is different from the solitude that Auster 'invents' for himself. I will discuss these notions more in the following section.

Again, as with the concept of trauma, Auster criticizes the poststructuralist notion of non-referentiality and fleeting subjectivity, as he establishes the alienation of his father, the epitome of decentered subjectivity, not as the norm but as a defect of character. Having established this state of being as faulty and destructive, he moves

on to demonstrate how a center, even though not uniform or stable, can be found in connection to others.

This idea ties in with the conclusion of *Moon Palace* as Marco Stanley Fogg finds himself on the beach, finally able to free himself from the trauma and repetition compulsion. He can also be seen as breaking free from the destructive isolation of the fleeting subjectivity and finding peace and a new beginning to his life from a good kind of solitude that centers his self in connection to the outer world. I will discuss his character and other central characters of *Moon Palace* in terms of decentered subjectivity and Auster's notions of the two sides of solitude in the following section as well.

4.2 The psychoanalytic and poststructuralist notion of decentered subjectivity

Decentered subjectivity is a post-Freudian concept developed and used by poststructuralists that I will, for the purposes of my analysis of the characters in *The Invention of Solitude* and *Moon Palace*, explain in relation to three notions of the concept: the indefiniteness of subject, plurality of selfhood, and a form of ontological 'anchoring' through imaginary identification with an ideal other. These notions are intertwined but they offer different aspects to the concept.

4.2.1 Indefiniteness of subject

Psychoanalysis has questioned the notion of a unified subject or identity, as it has denied the existence of a fully present center controlled by the subject. Freud introduced the unconscious, and thus took away the empiricist idea of the subject's control over his mind. According to Freud's theory the unconscious is formed of the repressed Oedipal desire in the child's formation of gender and identity, producing a radically split subject (the conscious and the unconscious). Jacques Lacan complicated the subjectivity further by claiming that the consciousness is structured like a language. Following the ideas of Jacques Derrida and other poststructuralists, he claimed that the subject cannot understand itself because of the consciousness' similarity to the circular nature of language as a construction of interminable deferment of meaning.

The poststructuralist understanding of language differs from that of structuralism, which assumes a unified whole of signifier and signified in a sign that would "preserve a certain identity of meaning" (*A Reader's Guide*, 151). The poststructuralists, in contrast, have discovered "the essentially *unstable* nature of signification" (151, emphasis orig.). The two sides of the sign (signifier and signified) are not stable, but rather a "momentary 'fix' between two moving layers" (151). Thus there is no set coherence of the sign, or, in extension, as Lacan has established in his comparison of consciousness to language, no definiteness of the subject.

4.2.2 Plurality of selfhood

Furthermore, according to Lacan, the subject is not a set entity with a certain role, but rather 'in process' and capable of being other than it is. He considers that human subjects "enter a pre-existing system of signifiers which take on meanings only within a language system" (*A Reader's Guide*, 162). Language lays down certain subject positions that the subjects occupy, but they are shifting and reversible ('I', 'she', 'he' etc.). The entry into language enables the subject to "find a subject position within a relational system (male/female, father/mother/daughter)" (163). The subject thus is not a coherent entity, but one that shifts in positions in relation to others and potentially has multiple roles simultaneously.

Also, there is a linguistic ontological split between the ego and the word 'I' it uses. The ego is not identical with this 'I'. When the ego refers to itself as 'I', the 'I' is the 'subject of the enunciation' and the ego is the 'subject of the enunciating'. The 'I' stands at the axis of signifier and signified, never able to give its position a full presence (*A Reader's Guide*, 164). These two split sides of subjectivity correspond to the realms of the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic'.

4.2.3 Identification in relation to an ideal other

Lacan distinguishes between the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic' states of being. The 'imaginary' is a "state in which there is no clear distinction between subject and object: no central self exists to set the object apart from subject" (*A Reader's guide*, 163). This is a state where the child is before he enters the system of language. In the pre-linguistic 'mirror stage' the child starts to "project a certain unity into the

fragmented self-image in the mirror (there does not have to be an actual mirror)" (164). Thus he produces a 'fictional' ideal, an 'ego', and starts to identify with the objects of the world as 'others' as the specular image is partly differentiated as another from the self. The child's differentiation of itself from others then happens through father's prohibition and the child is "thrown headlong into the 'symbolic' world of differences (male/female, father/son, present/absent, and so on)" (164). The child thus learns that he is separate from the mother and begins to identify himself in relation to others.

As, or even before the child enters the system of language and the realm of the 'symbolic' (the social, cultural and linguistic networks the child is born into) he is situated in relation to this symbolic universe. The parents' speech is assumed by the child as elements of identification which are incorporated as unconscious points of relation. These form the *Ideal*, which does not mean anything perfect or literally "ideal", but rather an unconscious script of sorts that will in some ways determine the subject's identity and actions. Here Lacan differentiates *ego ideal* and *ideal ego*. In his formulation of 1953, the ideal ego is the image one assumes and ego ideal is the symbolic point, which gives one a place and supplies the point from which one is looked at.

4.3 Centering of the self in *The Invention of Solitude*

The way in which Auster presents his absent father in *The Invention of Solitude* ties this absence with the poststructuralist concept of the decentered subjectivity. The desire of Auster to center his own self and thus claim his own identity requires him to differentiate from his father. This happens by linking identity to solitude and distinguishing between two types of solitude. The destructive and isolating solitude, carried on to Paul Auster by his father, and the creative solitude that "A." invents for himself in the second part of the book. I will first analyze the absent character of Samuel Auster, and then demonstrate how Paul Auster differentiates himself from his father in order to claim identity and to invent a positive model of solitude to pass on to his own son.

4.3.1 Samuel Auster as an epitome of the decentered subjectivity

In *The Invention of Solitude* the character of Paul Auster's father, Samuel, is defined in terms that make him an epitome of the poststructuralist notion of the decentered subjectivity. The indefiniteness of his being is marked by the impossibility to grasp his essence. What makes Samuel an epitome of decentered subjectivity is that he is paradoxically defined by his very indefiniteness: "… the people closest to him had learned to accept [his] absence, to treat it as the fundamental quality of his being" (*Invention,* 6). This paradoxical quality of Samuel's being is also indicated by the title of the first part of the book: "Portrait of an Invisible Man". The description of an absent or invisible figure is doomed to circle around his characteristics, never penetrating the surface to find an essence, assuming there is one. This description is indeed parallel to that of poststructuralist understanding of the structure of language, parallel to consciousness, as Lacan has it.

Samuel Auster is described, not only as absent in many ways, but also elusive whenever he is around: "Devoid of passion, either for a thing, a person, or an idea, incapable or unwilling to reveal himself under any circumstances, he had managed to keep himself at a distance from life, to avoid immersion in the quick of things" (6). He is a man with no inner life and no capacity for intimacy. The excerpt also suggests that his elusiveness is experienced by himself as well as by those around him. In addition to elusiveness or indefiniteness there are also hints of plurality of selfhood: "Because the domain of the other was unreal to him, his incursions into that domain were made with a part of himself he considered to be equally unreal, another self he had trained as an actor to represent him" (16). To hide his true persona, or to escape the indefiniteness of his self, he had created a character for himself in order to function with the outer world:

> What people saw when he appeared before them, then, was not really him, but a person he had invented, an artificial creature he could manipulate in order to manipulate others. He himself remained invisible, a puppeteer working the strings of his alter-ego from a dark, solitary place behind the curtain. (16)

It is as if he, in psychoanalytic terms, could not differentiate between himself and others and thus had to make an 'other' of himself in order to be in interaction with others. As if he would exist mainly in the Lacanian realm of 'imaginary', where no central self exists to set the subject apart from the object.

Samuel Auster is also described unable to center himself in relation to the outer world: “It was never possible for him to be where he was. For as long as he lived, he was somewhere else, between here and there. But never really here. And never really there” (19). His inability to center his identity ties with the absence he emanates to those around him. His self is not located within himself nor in the space he occupies within the world.

> The point is: his life was not centered around the place where he lived. His house was just one of many stopping places in a restless, unmoored existence, and this lack of center had the effect of turning him into a perpetual outsider, a tourist of his own life. You never had the feeling that he could be located. (9)

The lack of center that Paul Auster’s father embodies is thus presented in negative terms, as a defect of character rather than the norm. The indefinite, plural, and unanchored identity of Samuel condemns him into a negative state of solitude. This model, which he passes on to his son, forces Paul to attempt to break free from this negative state by differentiating himself from his father. He does this by inventing a better state of solitude and centering himself in relation to others and the outer world.

4.3.2 The centering of the self of Paul Auster

In the first part of the book Auster describes the remoteness of his father in negative terms of solitude. He says about the aloneness of his father:

> Solitary. But not in the sense of being alone. Not solitary in the way Thoreau was, for example, exiling himself in order to find out where he was; not solitary in the way Jonah was, praying for deliverance in the belly of the whale. Solitary in the sense of retreat. In the sense of not having to see himself, of not having to see himself being seen by anyone else. (17)

Solitude, just like absence, is not merely described as physical separation of others, but as emotional inaccessibility in the presence of others. Auster describes the solitude of his father as a type of escapism: a means of escaping oneself by refusing to reflect oneself in connection to others or using the solitude to self-reflect. By identifying the negative features of his father’s solitude, Auster hints on the possibility for another type of solitude he then, in the second part of the book, proceeds to build for himself. As Paul learns about the trauma his father had suffered as a child, that at the age of seven he had witnessed his mother shoot and kill his father, he understands that this explains the incapacity of his father for intimacy and

his avoidance to trust anyone. This further marks the state of Samuel Auster not as the norm, as defined by the poststructuralists, but as a harmful symptom of a traumatic experience. Auster then takes it as his occupation to work through this trauma, passed on to him by the remoteness of his father, and to define an alternative meaning of solitude to pass on to his own son.

Auster has explained in an interview (1990) how he understands solitude as something that, rather than separates us from others, actually connects us inseparably to others. He refers to Lacan's notion of the 'mirror-stage' and how we learn our separateness of others through the experience of seeing our mothers look at us. Self-consciousness, he explains, is the act of looking at ourselves in the stead of the mother: "It's no longer the mother who is looking at us then – we're looking at ourselves. But we can only see ourselves because someone else has seen us first. In other words, we learn our solitude from others" ("Interview", 143-144). Auster here links the formation of identity to aloneness. He sees solitude as something we all share, the essential condition of our being: "even if we're surrounded by others, we essentially live our lives alone: real life takes place within us" ("Interview", 142). The absolute solitude of our consciousness, the fact that it is impossible for us to know what someone else is thinking, is the formatting basis of our identity. Yet, as he says about the mirror stage, we learn our solitude from others. Solitude cannot exist without the existence of others. Furthermore, Auster says that we only understand our connection to others through solitude:

> It isn't possible for a person to isolate himself from other people. No matter how apart you might find yourself in a physical sense (…) you discover that you are inhabited by others. Your language, your memories, even your sense of isolation – every thought in your head has been born from your connection to others. ("Interview", 144)

This sense of solitude as a way to connect to others and the outer world is Auster's way of defining solitude in more positive terms than what he learned from his father. In the second part of *Invention of Solitude* he uses memory as a tool to center his self in connection to others and defines solitude as a state of finding that connection and also of fostering creativity.

John D. Barbour, in his article about *The Invention of Solitude,* compares Auster's attempt to explore the links between solitude and creativity in *Invention* with British

psychoanalyst Anthony Storr's ideas in Storr's article *Solitude: A Return to the Self.* According to Storr the adult's capacity for solitude originates from the infant's experience of being alone in the presence of the mother and on a secure attachment to the mother so that the child is not anxious about her possible departure. "A basic assurance that one is loved frees one from having to produce an expected or acceptable response so that one can explore what one really wants or thinks. In this way Storr links solitude to imagination and creativity" ("Solitude", 21). Solitude seems to be necessary for some people to do creative work and thus is as important as human relationships in emotional maturity. While Storr concentrates mainly on the positive sides of solitude as fostering creativity, Auster shows the negative side to it as well in "The Book of Memory". As I have described earlier, his solitary dwelling in 6 Varick Street, where he is writing the second half of *Invention* is gloomy in its isolation from the world. Auster is painfully separated from his son but shows determination in his attempt to give solitude a more positive value than what he saw in his father's aloneness. He determines: "Only one thing is certain: he cannot be anywhere until he is here" (*Invention,* 83). In contrast to his father's existence, Auster realizes he has to center himself in relation to outer world in order to claim identity.

In "The Book of Memory" Auster redefines solitude as necessary for a writer's creativity: "Every book is an image of solitude … A man sits alone in a room and writes" (145). But each product of solitude is a means of reaching out to a reader, who in turn reads in solitude and becomes absorbed in someone else's mind: reading and writing form a kind of companionship in solitude: "Even though there is only one man in the room, there are two … Therefore, he tells himself, it is possible to be alone and not be alone at the same moment" (145-146). This is one way how Auster invents solitude as a connection to others through creativity. Another way is through memory: "it is only in the darkness of solitude that the work of memory begins" (176). Solitude makes it possible for one to forget oneself and turn full attention to the world and the connections in it as revealed in memory. This is how Auster interprets solitude as a way to connect to the world: a way out of isolation and a mode of access to other people:

> As he writes, he feels that he is moving inward (through himself) and at the same time moving outward (towards the world) (…) even alone, in the deepest

> solitude of his room, he was not alone, or, more precisely, that the moment he began to try to speak of that solitude, he had become more than just himself. Memory, therefore, not simply as the resurrection of one's private past but an immersion in the past of others, which is to say: history (…). (148-149)

Auster thus gives solitude an opposite meaning than it had in his father's life: instead of using solitude to isolate from the world, he uses it to reach out towards the world through creativity and through memory, thus connecting himself to the outer world and centering his self in relation to it.

4.4 Decentered subjectivities and centering of the self in *Moon Palace*

Auster's three main characters in *Moon Palace*, Thomas Effing, Solomon Barber and Marco Fogg all display qualities of decentered subjectivity and all of them go through the stages of disintegration and reassembling as a part of the circular structure of the narrative. As an example of how the notion of decentered subjectivity is used in a fictional work in contrast to an autobiographical one I will depict Thomas Effing's loss of selfhood and the consequent centering of self, as well as the anchoring of the self of Marco Fogg as the end of the narrative. Thomas Effing is able to center his self in the solitude of the desert through creativeness, echoing the positive notion of solitude Auster defines for himself in "The Book of Memory". At the end of the novel the protagonist Marco Fogg is able to center himself in relation to the outer world, as he finally finds release from his trauma and repetition compulsion.

4.4.1 The centering of the self of Julian Barber/Thomas Effing

Thomas Effing's life-changing experiences in the desert express at first the inability to locate oneself in relation to the outer world. He goes to the desert as Julian Barber, a celebrated painter, and after a loss of his selfhood as a result of a traumatic event, and a consequent centering of the self through creativity, emerges from the desert as another man and takes on the name Thomas Effing. As he has begun his journey into the desert he describes the effects the expanses of the landscape have on his self-definition and on his painting as a medium of self-expression:

> The mountains, the snow on top of the mountains, the clouds hovering around the snow. After a while they began to merge together and I couldn't tell them apart. (…) It didn't feel human anymore (…) The land is too big out there, and

> after a while it starts to swallow you up (…) You try to find your bearings in it, but it's too big, the dimensions are too monstrous, and eventually (…) it just stops being there. There's no world, no land, no nothing (…) The only place you exist is in your head. (151-152).

This description matches the indefiniteness of subjectivity: everything exists in one's consciousness, which, in itself, is not a definite entity. Reality, according to the poststructuralist ontology, is a shifting figment, and that is what Julian Barber experiences in the desert.

After a period of inner turmoil and near insanity he then succeeds in finding his self through creativity, echoing the way Paul Auster defines his better way of solitude in *Invention*. After the traumatic experience of his travel companion's death, Effing wanders around in the desert: "He made a half-hearted attempt to extricate himself from the canyon, but he soon got lost in a maze of obstacles: cliffs, gorges, unclimbable buttes … Effing was convinced his life was over … he was tormented by the thought that he was drifting farther and farther from the possibility of rescue" (160). This drifting is not only meant in spatial sense, but as the drifting away of his persona:

> Even if he managed to live through it, he realized that everything was finished for him. Byrne's death had seen to that, and there was no way he could ever bring himself to go home (…) That was the moment when Julian Barber was obliterated: out there in the desert (…) he simply canceled himself out. (160-161)

He recognizes that his final loss of selfhood is the result of the traumatic experience he has gone through. Just as the character of Auster's father in Auster's memoir, Thomas Effing, too, epitomizes the decentered subjectivity only as a result of trauma and as a defect of identity, something to overcome. This defect is overcome by Effing's discovery of a new kind of creativity in the isolation of his cave in the desert.

The first step into centering the self for Effing after the final disintegration of his identity is settling into the cave he finds in the middle of the desert. He no longer wanders aimlessly around the desert but has found a place, a sort of reference point in the midst of the indefiniteness. After a while he starts to paint again, freed by the knowledge that no-one will ever see his produce and by the finiteness of his supplies:

> (…) no one would ever see these paintings. That was a foregone conclusion, but rather than torment Effing with a sense of futility, it actually seemed to liberate him (…) eventually his materials were going to run out (…) From the very first moment, therefore, the end was already in sight (…) This gave a particular poignancy to everything he did during those months. (166-167)

These facts turn Effing's art into something that it has never been before: "He was working for himself now, no longer burdened by the threat of other people's opinions, and that alone was enough to produce a fundamental change in how he approached his art" (166). His solitude makes him see how art can be a form of reaching out to the world and finding one's place in it: "The true purpose of art was not to create beautiful objects, he discovered. It was a method of understanding, a way of penetrating the world and finding one's place in it" (166). When he finally runs out of material and space, he notices that "[c]ontrary to what he had been expecting, this did not dampen his spirits. He had descended so deeply into his solitude by then that he no longer needed any distractions" (168). Solitude thusly fosters creativity for Effing in a similar way that it does for Auster in his memoir "Book of Memory". This reaching out towards the world from one's solitude results in overcoming the disintegration of identity caused by trauma.

4.4.2 The anchoring of the self of Marco Fogg

Marco Fogg, the protagonist of *Moon Palace*, also has to overcome his disintegration of identity, caused by the trauma of the absent father and its repetitions. Lacan's notion of the mirror-stage can be seen in the way Fogg finally centers his self by anchoring himself in relation to the outer reality. The idea of separating oneself from others and centering one's self in relation to others, which essentially happens in the mirror-stage, is verbalized by Effing's ill-fated travel companion, the topographer Edward Byrne, as Effing recounts to Marco Fogg: "Byrne told me that you can't fix your exact position on the earth without referring to some point in the sky … We find ourselves only by looking to what we're not" (149-150). This topographical fact serves as a metaphor for the notion of *ego ideal*, the symbolic point which supplies the point from which one is "looked at"; the idea of the point of reference that determines where and who one is.

This notion of anchoring oneself in relation to an outer point of reference is then reflected in the ending of the narrative as Fogg arrives to the western end of the

continent as a result of a sort of pilgrimage to a place where he would find himself. The importance of this walk and its final destination is made clear in his recount of the walk:

> I walked without interruption, heading toward the Pacific, borne along by a growing sense of happiness. Once I reached the end of the continent, I felt that some important question would be resolved for me (…) I had only to keep walking to know that I had left my self behind, that I was no longer the person I had once been (297).

Fogg starts his trek as a disintegrated, traumatized, decentered subjectivity, and emerges from it as another, much in the same fashion as his grandfather Effing had done, in his pivotal experience in the desert. When he finds himself at the end of the journey, he positions himself in relation to all things real and 'other' around him: "It was four o'clock in the afternoon when I took off my boots and felt the sand against the soles of my feet … Behind me, the town went about its business … As I looked down the curve of the coast, I saw the lights of the houses" (297-298). He stands still for a long time, centering himself as separate from everything around him and finally, echoing the topographical idea of finding oneself in relation to an object in the sky and Lacan's notion of the symbolic point of reference of the *ego ideal*, Fogg watches the moon find its place in the sky: "the moon came up from behind the hills … I kept my eyes on it as it rose into the night sky, not turning away until it had found its place in the darkness" (298). As the moon finds its place in the sky, it also settles as the symbolic point of reference for Marco Fogg, who at that moment is able to anchor his self within the world of things.

4.5 Conclusions

The central characters of *The Invention of Solitude* and *Moon Palace* all resemble poststructuralist decentered subjectivities. In both works the state of indefinite selfhood is marked as a defect of character and the result of trauma. In both works the narrative is formed of the journey towards overcoming this state and centering of self in some form. In *Invention* Paul Auster uses the act of writing itself as a form of reaching towards the world of others through solitude and memory and is thus able to overcome the harmful disintegration of self passed on to him in the example of his father. As the title suggests, the book is an "invention", an active working of identity formation in the form of a memoir. *Moon Palace*, then, works more as a metaphor, a

sign that refers to the actions needed to overcome a disintegrated identity. Again, as with the notion of trauma, Auster uses theoretical frameworks in formatting a more general description of the experience of subjectivity he has had in his own life. Lacan's ideas have influenced his metaphorical presentation of subjectivity and its centering.

5 Metaphor and Metonymy

5.1 Realist / figurative signifiers of the absent

Auster has employed the theme of the absent father, which stems from his own experience, as a narrative device initiating the trauma that is used for structuring a type of narrative, which presents the possibility of reference to reality. Within the theme he has also presented the poststructuralist notion of decentered subjectivity as a defect of character, a faulty and destructive state that can be overcome. These aspects have already been discussed in the two preceding chapters. Another aspect that ties to the theme of the absent father is the use of the tropes of metaphor and metonymy in the signification of absence in *The Invention of Solitude* and *Moon Palace*. In the following chapter I will discuss how these two tropes are used in the two works and how they might also coincide with the genres of autobiography and fiction.

I will first explain the two terms as applied to the theory of the structure of language by Roman Jakobson, and then as applied to psychoanalytic thought as the basic functions of the unconscious by Jacques Lacan. As a third development on the study of metaphor and metonymy I will introduce the poststructuralist deconstruction of the binary pair of the two tropes by J. Hillis Miller. I will then proceed to apply the study of the tropes to the two works by Paul Auster to see where among these lines of study his works can be situated.

I will argue that Auster uses the two tropes to signify the absent father in *The Invention of Solitude* and the protagonist's father figure Uncle Victor in *Moon Palace*. A move from metonymic to metaphoric can be seen in this signification. I will also further discuss how these "poles of language", as Jakobson called the tropes of metaphor and metonymy, can perhaps correspond to the classification of the

genres of autobiography and fiction, and the deconstruction of the binary poles be paralleled to the modern understanding of the genres. Before analysis, I will briefly account the notions of metaphor and metonymy as relevant to my discussion.

5.2 Metaphor and metonymy from structuralism to psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theories

5.2.1 Structuralism: Roman Jakobson on metaphor and metonymy

Roman Jakobson associates the tropes of metaphor and metonymy to what he, following Saussure, sees as the two modes of arrangements of signs in the structure of language. He asserts a fundamental distinction between horizontal and vertical dimensions of language; those of *selection* and *combination*. Selection implies substitution, whereas combination implies sequence and context. These relations of similarity and of contiguity are, according to Jakobson, the metaphoric and metonymic poles of language ("Lacan and Jakobson", 152). As René Dirven puts it in his abstract of Jakobson's revised article, Jakobson sees these poles as the two basic modes or ways of thought reflected in general human behavior and in language: "The metaphoric is based upon substitution and similarity, the metonymic upon predication, contexture and contiguity" ("The Metaphoric and Metonymic", 41). The development of a discourse takes place along these two different semantic lines: the metaphoric way connects topics through their similarity and the metonymic through their contiguity.

In his article in 1956 "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances" (revised as "The Metaphoric and Metonymic…", 1971) Jakobson links these two dimensions of language to two types of aphasia (speech defect). He also suggests that normal speech behavior tends towards one or other extreme: "In normal verbal behavior both processes are continually operative, but careful observation will reveal that under the influence of a cultural pattern, personality, and verbal style, preference is given to one of the two processes over the other" (42). In extension, he suggests that literary styles can be detected as leaning towards either the metaphoric or the metonymic.

He goes on to argue that the poetry of romanticism and symbolism are metaphoric, while works of literary realism are metonymic. The basis of this taxonomy of verbal

art is that in its broad sense, metonymy involves the shift from one element in a sequence to another and requires a context for its operation (e.g. we refer to a *cup* of something, when we mean its contents). Jakobson links realism with metonymy since it "speaks of its object by offering the reader aspects, parts, and contextual details, in order to evoke a whole" (*A Reader's Guide*, 79). He says about the realist author that he is "fond of synechdochic details" ("The Metaphoric and Metonymic", 43). About the metaphoric quality of romantic and symbolist poetry, then, Jakobson states conclusively: "The primacy of the metaphoric process in the literary schools of romanticism and symbolism has been repeatedly acknowledged" (43). He states that "rich material for the study of this relationship is to be found in verse patterns which require a compulsory PARALLELISM between adjacent lines" (43, emphasis orig.).

5.2.2 Psychoanalysis: Lacan's theory of the unconscious based on the structure of language

Jacques Lacan was influenced by the structuralist ideas of Saussure and Jakobson when he started developing Freud's theory of the unconscious along the lines of linguistic studies. He claimed that the unconscious was structured in the same way as language is and the distinction between metaphor and metonymy is an important element in his formulation of the unconscious. Basing his description of the concepts on those of Saussure and Jakobson, he added some aspects by combining these linguistic notions to the ideas of Freud. What Lacan did was basically to juxtapose the binary pair of metaphor and metonymy with a binary pair that Freud had claimed as the basic functions of the unconscious: condensation and displacement. Metaphor, functioning through similarities and substitutions, coincides with condensation, and metonymy, functioning through contiguity and difference, coincides with displacement.

According to Freud's theory of dreams, the dream images that express repressed desires undergo 'condensation', where several images combine, and 'displacement', where significance shifts from one image to a contiguous one (*A Reader's Guide*, 165). In language the tropes serve to present ideas in different forms from the original content by means of substitution in metaphor and association in metonymy. The two functions of the unconscious work similarly by rendering certain objects of the mind unrecognizable for the consciousness: "The unconscious hides meaning in

symbolic images which need to be deciphered" (*A Reader's Guide*, 165). The parallel between linguistic tropes and psychic tropes is clear, and Lacan makes use of the linguistic terms to explain the structure of the unconscious. The main difference between metaphor and metonymy for Lacan is that metaphor functions to suppress, while metonymy functions to combine: "it is in the *word-to-word* connexion [sic.] that metonymy is based … *One word for another*: that is the formula for the metaphor" (*Écrits: A Selection*, 156-157, emphasis orig.).

5.2.3 Post-structuralism: J. Hillis Miller's deconstruction of Jakobson's binary distinction between metaphor and metonymy

J. Hillis Miller has deconstructed Jakobson's opposition between the 'realist' metonymy and the 'poetic' metaphor (*A Reader's Guide*, 183). He takes as example a representative of the realist tradition: Dickens's *Sketches by Boz*, and shows how its realism is "not a mimetic effect but a figurative one" (182). The example is explained in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*:

> Looking at Monmouth Street, Boz sees 'things, human artifacts, streets, buildings, vehicles, old clothes in shops'. These things metonymically signify something which is absent: he infers from the things 'the life that is lived among them' (…) [Miller] shows how the metonymic dead men's clothes come to life in Boz's mind as he imagines their absent wearers: 'waistcoats have almost burst with anxiety to put themselves on'. (182)

Just as Jakobson asserted, these synechdoches metonymically evoke their associative context (the men's possessions evoke their absent owner). Miller, however, suggests further:

> This metonymic 'reciprocity' between a person and his surroundings (house, possessions, and so on) 'is the basis for the metaphorical substitutions so frequent in Dickens's fiction'. Metonymy asserts an *association* between clothes and wearer, while metaphor suggests a *similarity* between them. First, clothes and wearer are linked by context, and secondly, as context fades, we allow clothes to substitute for the wearer. (183, emphasis orig.)

In effect, the metonymic quality of realism actually becomes metaphoric: the metonymic process acknowledges its own figurativeness and becomes as much fiction as metaphor, which is something that Jakobson did not account for in his distinctive taxonomy of verbal art.

Miller's deconstruction invalidates Jakobson's taxonomy: "Poetry, however metaphorical, is liable to be 'read literally', and realistic writing, however metonymic, is open to 'a correct figurative reading which sees it as fiction rather than *mimesis*' ", (183, emphasis orig.). This assertion, I feel, is close to the modern understanding of the relation between autobiography and fiction, and can be paralleled to the view of the genres not as mimetic and imaginative respectively, but both as figurative. I will comment on this correspondence after the following sections concerning the use of metaphor and metonymy in Auster's autobiographical *Invention of Solitude* and fictional *Moon Palace*.

5.3 Metaphor, metonymy and absence in *The Invention of Solitude*

In *The Invention of Solitude* Paul Auster starts to reconstruct the figure of his deceased father through his possessions. He addresses the house Samuel Auster lived in until he died (Paul's childhood home), as well as the objects Samuel had left behind. Paul also finds photographs of Samuel that he has never seen before. These possessions, metonymic in nature, become metaphoric as Paul attempts to decipher the character of his absent-in-life father. This method results in the deconstructive effect of unraveling the figurativeness of the metonymic quality of realism, and as such can be seen to comment on the referential ability of autobiography.

5.3.1 Samuel Auster's house: condensation of signifier and signified

Samuel Auster's house metonymically signifies its absent owner. Having been the sole inhabitant there for fifteen years, Samuel's house is foremost associated with him. Metonymically, the house evokes memories of his father for Paul: "Buying it had been a big step for my parents, a sign of growing wealth … Given the fact that he wound up spending the rest of his life in that house, it is ironic that my father at first resisted moving there" (*Invention*, 7-8). The condition of the house also evokes Samuel's character and his habits:

> During those last fifteen years he changed almost nothing in the house. He did not add any furniture, he did not remove any furniture. The walls remained the same color, the pots and pans were not replaced, even my mother's dresses were not thrown out – but stored away in an attic closet (…) It was not that he was clinging to the past, trying to preserve the house as a museum. On the contrary, he seemed to be unaware of what he was doing. It was negligence that governed him, not memory (…). (8-9)

The metonymical association between the condition of the house and the character of its owner, however, quickly turns into a metaphorical parallel between the two. Paul starts to use the house as a metaphor in explaining the character of his father, and even addresses this signification:

> Still, the house seems important to me, if only to the extent that it was neglected – symptomatic of a state of mind that, otherwise inaccessible, manifested itself in the concrete images of unconscious behavior. The house became the metaphor of my father's life, the exact and faithful representation of his inner world. (9)

The metaphoric quality of Samuel's house coincides with his unconscious behavior that is manifested as his negligence towards the house. Unconsciously, Samuel has seemed to make the house a symbol of his inner self. A condensation of his self and the house has occurred, which is clear to Paul, but had been unrecognizable to Samuel himself. As Paul takes on the house as a metaphor for its absent owner, it substitutes the original subject of the discourse:

> For although he kept the house tidy and preserved it more or less as it had been, it underwent a gradual and ineluctable process of disintegration. He was neat, he always put things back in their proper place, but nothing was cared for, nothing was ever cleaned. The furniture, especially in the rooms he rarely visited, was covered with dust, cobwebs, the signs of total neglect; the kitchen stove was so encrusted with charred food that it had become unsalvageable (…). (9).

The depiction of Auster's father becomes, through metonymic association and metaphoric parallel and substitution, a depiction of his house. In psychoanalytical terms the images of Samuel Auster and of his house undergo condensation and combine as one.

5.3.2 Samuel Auster through photographs: substituting synecdochic details for the whole

As Paul goes through the rooms of the house, emptying them of his father's possessions, he comes across a box of photographs he has never seen before. He says about them: "It seemed that they could tell me things I had never known before, reveal some previously hidden truth" (*Invention*, 14). At first he thinks they can offer him a unique insight into the character of his father. Photographs are commonly given great value as to their presumed ability to refer to the past and seemingly offer

objective evidence (Sarah Edge: "Photography and Poststructuralism"). Poststructuralist thinkers, however, have been skeptical about the referential ability of photographs. Roland Barthes, for example, in *Camera Lucinda* (1970) has said this about photographs as a signifying system: "The important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force, and that its testimony bears not on the object but on the time … in the photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation (Barthes 1984: 88-9)" (quoted in "Photography and Poststructuralism", 311). Allan Sekula, in "The Invention of Photographic Meaning" (1982), has confirmed how "the meaning of any photographic message is necessarily context-determined" (85, quoted in "Photography and Poststructuralism", 312). Paul Auster likewise discovers how it is misguided to rely on the metonymical representational power of photographs.

Photographs can be seen as metonymically referring to their objects. A photograph offers a synecdochic detail of its object's past. Thus, when Paul looks at pictures of his father, he can see symbols of a man he knew, but not new information on his persona:

> Most of these pictures did not tell me anything new, but they helped to fill in gaps, confirm impressions, offer proof where none had existed before. A series of snapshots of him as bachelor, for example, probably taken over a number of years, gives a precise account of certain aspects of his personality that had been submerged during the years of his marriage, a side of him I did not begin to see until after his divorce. (15)

Roman Jakobson linked realism to metonymy because it used aspects and synecdochic details in order to evoke a whole. In fact, photographs do precisely that and this is also exactly how Paul attempts to reconstruct his father's persona. However, as in J. Hillis Miller's deconstructive method, the metonymical pictures turn from associative material to metaphoric symbols of their subject. The fading of the context, which according to Sekula determines the meaning of "any photographic message", results in the metonymic signification acknowledging its own figurativeness and so the signifier substitutes the signified. Paul explains how the photographs "seemed to reaffirm [his] father's physical presence in the world":

> to give me the illusion that he was still there. The fact that many of these pictures were ones I had never seen before, especially the ones from his youth,

> gave me the odd sensation that I was meeting him for the first time, that a part of him was only just beginning to exist. (14-15)

The photographs of Samuel Auster have substituted him for Paul as he feels his father's presence more strongly through them than he did from his actual physical self when he was alive.

To go further into the metaphorical quality of the photographs' signification of their subject, Samuel Auster, Paul actually uses one as a metaphor for his father's persona, just as he did with his house:

> From a bag of loose pictures: a trick photograph taken in an Atlantic City studio sometime during the Forties. There are several of him sitting around a table, each image shot from a different angle, so that at first you think it must be a group of several different men. (…) There are five of him there, and yet the nature of the trick photography denies the possibility of eye contact among the various selves. Each one is condemned to go on staring into space, as if under the gaze of the others, but seeing nothing, never able to see anything. It is a picture of death, a portrait of an invisible man. (33)

This is the photograph that most strongly symbolizes Samuel's character to Paul. He calls it "a portrait of an invisible man", and has chosen that expression as the title of the part of the book about his father. The picture is also significant as the cover picture of many editions of the book (e.g. London: Faber and Faber, 2012). Again, as with the house, the pictures of Samuel have gone from metonymically associative material to metaphorically symbolic and as the pictures have substituted their subject, the metonymic (realist) quality of the signification has become as figurative as metaphor.

5.3.3 Samuel Auster's objects: substitution as the fading of the context

Paul also addresses other possessions of Samuel: "There is nothing more terrible, I learned, than having to face the objects of a dead man. Things are inert: they have meaning only in function of the life that makes use of them" (10). The context of the objects' ownership signifies the associative metonymic relationship that exists between these objects and their absent owner. Auster continues: "In themselves, the things mean nothing, like the cooking utensils of some vanished civilization. And yet they say something to us, standing there not as objects but as remnants of thought, of consciousness, emblems of the solitude in which a man comes to make decisions about himself" (10-11). The metonymic signification of these objects becomes

foregrounded as their owner is gone and since the context of that ownership is fading, the objects are beginning to substitute for their associative subject. This, again, is the metonymic process, as described by J. Hillis Miller, in which the metonymic relationship becomes figurative rather than realist, and along with the substitution that occurs, the relationship becomes metaphoric.

In the "single worst moment" of the days Paul spent clearing his father's house (13), the relationship between Samuel Auster and his possessions becomes metaphoric for Paul as he describes how he felt a parallel between Samuel's body and his possessions:

> I walked across the front lawn in the pouring rain to dump an armful of my father's ties into the back of a Good Will Mission truck (…) many of them I remembered from my childhood: the patterns, the colors, the shapes that had been embedded in my earliest consciousness, as clearly as my father's face had been (…) More than seeing the coffin itself being lowered into the ground, the act of throwing away these ties seemed to embody for me the idea of burial. (13)

The parallel between the ties Paul remembers from his childhood and the memory of his father's face asserts an association between the two in the context of his father's persona. But as the context has faded, the objects have substituted their absent owner, and burying them is more meaningful for Paul than burying his father's actual body.

From these examples it is clear that Auster acknowledges the poststructuralist deconstruction of the binary pair of metonymic and metaphoric signification and engages in seeing them both as figurative rather than mimetic and imaginative respectively. However, a final comment made on the quality of the relationship between the objects and their absent owner hints at a view that complicates the signification of the tropes:

> At first I thought it would be a comfort to hold on to these things, that they would remind me of my father and make me think of him as I went about my life. But objects, it seems, are no more than objects. I am used to them now, I have begun to think of them as my own. I read time by his watch, I wear his sweaters, I drive around in his car. But all this is no more than an illusion of intimacy. I have already appropriated these things. My father has vanished from them, has become invisible again and sooner or later they will break down, fall apart, and have to be thrown away. (73)

The objects, as the original context of their signifying relation with their owner eventually vanishes, find a new context and new signifying relation with a new owner. As this happens, the metaphoric relation switches back to a metonymic one. This, I feel, is again part of Auster's "sufficient realism" ("Introduction", 6). As Debra Shostak has pointed out, Auster "posits the conditions under which a representational mode of realism may coexist with the postmodern" ("Under the Sign", 149). Having acknowledged the figurativeness of both significations, I argue that he goes on to show that reference to reality is still possible. As the context that bound the signifier (the objects) and the signified (their absent owner) switches, metonymy again replaces metaphor as a new relation between the signifier (the objects) and the signified (their new owner) and thus reference to reality is possible, however context- and time bound it may be.

5.4 Metaphor, metonymy and absence in *Moon Palace*

The notion of metaphor and metonymy is not as prominent in *Moon Palace* as it is in the first part of *The Invention of Solitude*. There is, however, a notable instance in the beginning of the story when Auster uses them in the signification of the absence of Marco Stanley Fogg's father figure, Uncle Victor. As Uncle Victor leaves for a long tour to the west with his band, he decides to get rid of everything he owns. He gives Marco his books: 1492 of them, as well as his suit and some important objects. These possessions become significant for Marco as the markers of his absent uncle and his strange behavior towards them marks his state of neurosis. It is noteworthy that Marco's obsession with these objects begins as his uncle leaves, even before Victor's untimely death, which then whirls Marco into a state of crisis. Uncle Victor is first absent, and then suddenly lost, but Marco's neurosis is marked with an inability to make a difference between the two.

5.4.1 Uncle Victor's suit: substituting presence for absence

The most curious case of a metonymical relation that becomes metaphorical in nature is the signification of Uncle Victor's suit as it is passed on to Marco. The signification is metaphoric, but not as straightforwardly as Samuel Auster's possessions are in *Invention*. If Samuel's house, for example, comes to symbolize his characteristics, Uncle Victor's suit actually comes to represent his function in

Marco's life as the surrogate father. Marco says about the suit: "At moments of stress and unhappiness, it was a particular comfort to feel myself swaddled in the warmth of my uncle's clothes, and there were times when I imagined the suit was actually holding me together, that if I did not wear it my body would fly apart" (14-15). Marco gives the suit the function of connecting him to the world, the very thing he unconsciously is yearning from his absent father. Lacking a father that would give him a reason for his existence in the world Marco first gives this role to his uncle, since he is the last living relative. When Uncle Victor then leaves, Marco transfers this function to Victor's suit and starts wearing it obsessively: "I felt at home in it, and since for all practical purposes I had no other home, I continued to wear it every day," he says (14). This obsessive behavior, unrecognized by Marco himself at the time, highlights his neurotic state and hints to the existentialist nature of his trauma.

The signification of the suit is curiously foregrounded by Marco in the absence of Uncle Victor. The metonymical relation of the suit and its previous owner should not be particularly strong, since Victor had actually worn it only a couple of times. As he gives it to Marco he says: "I want you to have the tweed suit I bought in the Loop a couple of winters back … I've worn it just twice … We'll go to the tailor first thing tomorrow morning and have it altered" (13). Not only has Marco most probably never, or once or twice at most, seen Victor in this suit, it is also *altered* for him. The alteration should presumably further diminish the already slight metonymical relation of the suit to its previous owner. The signification of the suit to Uncle Victor is of course highlighted by the absence of the owner, but the way Marco gives the role of his uncle to the inanimate suit connects the signification to Marco's traumatic state.

If the suit first becomes a metaphor for the function of Uncle Victor in Marco's life as a result of Victor's absence, the new ownership of the suit yields a metaphoric signification of its own, on top of the other one. In addition to the suit having a personal signification to Uncle Victor for Marco, it also forms a relation to Marco for his peers: "More than anything else, the suit was the badge of my identity, the emblem of how I wanted others to see me" (15). Marco is attempting to negate his own persona and replacing it with the material surrogate for his uncle, the substitute for his missing father. The lack of essence the suit emblemizes in its hollow shape, however, leaves Marco with a hollow sign for a persona. Again critiquing the

poststructuralist existentialism of pure signification, Auster thus shows the inefficiency of such hollow signification. He connects it to trauma and obsessiveness; defects of personality that can be overcome.

The inefficiency of pure signification is foregrounded in the way the metonymical connection of Marco and his suit turns metaphorical and dissolves. The referral of his suit as "a badge of identity" is meant metonymically: Marco wishes others to see his connection to the world, the material sign for his surrogate father and last relative, in the synecdochic suit, as they see him. However, the suit comes to symbolize Marco's dissolving personality in a metaphorical way as it starts to wear and tear: "after several months of constant wear, it began to give a haphazard impression, hanging on my skinny frame like some wrinkled afterthought, a sagging turmoil of wool" (15). Echoing the way Samuel Auster's house became a metaphor for his inner self in *Invention*, Marco's suit starts to resemble his dissolving inner state. Uncle Victor's departure, repeating the absence of Marco's father, has already set Marco on the path towards neurosis, even though the final lapse happens after Victor's death. Marco's traumatic state is marked by his inability to separate between absence and loss (Dominick LaCapra: "Trauma, Absence, Loss"). The suit becomes a metaphor for Marco's deteriorating sanity, and the final look at it, after Uncle Victor's death, gives a telling account of Marco's state: "By the time I had started classes for my third year (September 1967), my suit was long gone … and I had finally abandoned it as a lost cause" (25). In *Moon Palace* the use of metonymy and metaphor is thus employed to serve the function of marking the protagonist's traumatic state. The functioning of the tropes as signifiers of the absent is similar, but whereas in *Invention* they serve to expose the figurative nature of realism, in *Moon Palace* they become markers of trauma, figurative in function but liable to be 'read literally', as J. Hillis Miller asserted.

5.4.2 Uncle Victor's books: symbolic substitutions – filling the gap of absence

Another signifying relation in *Moon Palace* is that of Uncle Victor and the books he gives to Marco. Debra Shostak, in her article about signification in *Moon Palace*, asserts that "[a]mong the deceased Victor's gifts to Fogg are a tweed suit and a collection of books. Victor's legacy thereby appears according to the two modes of of reference, the image and the word" ("Under the Sign", 154). As with the suit, the

books serve the function of emblemizing pure signification for Marco and as such become the measure of his trauma. When he first receives the books, Marco makes furniture out of them. The boxes of books constitute his living space, emphasizing their physicality rather than the potential referentiality of their contents. The metonymical relation of the books to Uncle Victor, resembled in Marco's initial refusal to get rid of the books as they evoke their absent owner, turns metaphorical as Marco gives them the function of serving as his surroundings. As with the suit, Marco wants to surround himself with the image of his uncle, the only thing he feels is connecting him to the world. By using the books exclusively as physical signifiers of his uncle, Marco denies the referential ability of the word they represent.

After Victor's death, then, Marco starts consuming the books. As a way of getting money after his small inheritance has run out, he needs to sell the books. Rather than simply carrying the books to a used books trader, he feels the need to read them through before that: "I found it wrenching to part with Uncle Victor's former possessions, but at the same time I knew that he would not have held it against me. I had somehow discharged my debt to him by reading the books" (22). Rather than acknowledging the referential ability of the words, his attitude towards the act of reading is arbitrary: "As far as I was concerned, each book was equal to every other book, each sentence was composed of exactly the right number of words, and each word stood exactly where it had to be" (21). Refusing to pass judgment on the books, the contents of them are meaningless for Marco. The act of reading the books serves as a way of keeping Uncle Victor present: "Each time I opened a box, I was able to enter another segment of my uncle's life … and it consoled me to feel that I was occupying the same mental space that Victor had once occupied" (21). In this act Marco is again trying to replace his own persona with that of the material signifier of his uncle.

The hollowness of this sign is again, as with the suit, symbolized by the lack of meaning of the contents of the books for Marco. Marco's inability to grasp the referentiality of the books' contents grows further towards the end of his reading task:

> The closer I got to the end, however, the more trouble the books gave me. I could feel my eyes making contact with the words on the page, but no meaning rose up to me anymore, no sounds echoed in my head. The black marks

> seemed wholly bewildering, an arbitrary collection of lines and curves that divulged nothing but their own muteness. Eventually, I did not even understand what I was reading. (29-30)

Marco's inability to understand the contents of what he is reading grows along with his descent into neurosis. He refers to how the dismantling of his living space as he sells off the books he has read corresponds to his inner state: "The room was a machine that measured my condition: how much of me remained, how much of me was no longer there … Piece by piece, I could watch myself disappear" (24). As happened with the suit, the books, too, come to symbolize Marco's disintegration of identity. Their signification follows the same journey as the suit's: from metonymical to metaphorical first of Uncle Victor's function in Marco's life and consequently of Marco's inner state.

5.5 Conclusions: autobiography and fiction as metonymic and metaphoric

The use of metaphor and metonymy in the signification of absence in Auster's autobiographical *The Invention of Solitude* can be seen to comment on the possibility of autobiographical reference to reality. Even though his reference to absence inevitably moves from metonymical signification to metaphorical and he thereby acknowledges the figurativeness of both significations, Auster still foregrounds the return to metonymical signification of objects to owner. Thus he seems to comment on the favor of context- and time-bound possibility for reference to reality. His use of the two tropes in the fictional *Moon Palace* is different in effect, as it mainly serves to reflect the protagonist's mental state. However, in this case, the figurativeness of the signification of objects to their owner is also associated with trauma as a state that can and has to be overcome in order to find one's place within the world and the possibility of self-reference. The tropes are thus in both genres used in Auster's method to find "sufficient realism", the possibility for a certain type of referentiality and existence that can be confirmed even after acknowledging the poststructuralist condition of existentialist doubt and non-referentiality.

If we are to engage with Jakobson's taxonomy of verbal art, it might be argued that as genres, autobiography would lean towards the metonymic, and fiction towards the metaphoric processes of language. Jakobson based his division of literary styles in

the different way in which they represent their contents: poetry works through parallelism and metaphor while literary realism works through synecdochic metonyms and contextual details. As I have argued in my analysis, fiction is formed so as to provide an ideal representation of an idea, e.g. trauma or decentered subjectivity. In autobiography, then, representative details are chosen from one's own experience in order to evoke a certain idea. In other words, fiction uses metaphors and parallelism in its representation and autobiography uses synecdochic and contextual details of reality.

Hence, according to J. Hillis Miller's deconstructive method of the binary pair of metaphor and metonymy, the apparent mimesis of metonymic signification proves to be as figurative as the imaginative signification of metaphor. It could be said that the synecdoches of reality provided by autobiographical texts turn from metonymical to metaphorical as they are chosen to represent a whole. As Miller concluded about the invalid taxonomy of poetry and realism: "Poetry, however metaphorical, is liable to be 'read literally', and realistic writing, however metonymic, is open to 'a correct figurative reading which sees it as fiction rather than *mimesis*'", (*A Reader's Guide*, 183). Thus: fiction, however metaphorical, is liable to be read literally, and autobiography, however metonymic, can be read figuratively. Auster's work is demonstrative of how fiction is based on reality as much as non-fiction is based on imagination.

The current understanding of autobiography, as explained by Martin Löschnigg in his article "Postclassical Narratology and the Theory of Autobiography" (2010) is compatible with this view of genres. The constructivist (narrativist) theories of autobiography emphasize "the role of narrative in the formation and maintenance of a sense of identity" (255). To put one's experience in the form of a narrative, which, to some degree, inevitably fictionalizes it, is to form a sense of identity. Autobiography thus serves a creative function and to see it in this way also revives the possibility for context-bound self-reference. With this in mind, it is clear why *Moon Palace*, a novel about the formation of identity, is written in the form of a fictional autobiography by the protagonist. The writing of autobiography is in itself an act of identity formation.

6 Conclusion

In my study I have attempted to differentiate the workings of a theme between the genres of autobiography and fiction. Within the study, I have also contributed to the yet scarce, but continually growing research of Paul Auster's works. With the case study of the theme of the absent father it can be said that Paul Auster uses theoretical frameworks in forming a narrative of a theme that arises from his own experiences. This happens both in autobiographical as well as fictional writing. His work is demonstrative of the modern understanding of autobiography in that it acknowledges the figurativeness (rather than mimetic quality) of autobiographical writing, but still does not forsake the possibility of reference to self and to reality. In this study I have found much support for Auster's "sufficient realism", as dubbed by Dennis Barone. Namely, on many accounts it can be seen how Auster moves beyond the poststructuralist condition of existential doubt and impossibility of reference, and revives the possibility for reference to the real.

By employing the theoretical notion of trauma Auster posits the conditions that insist on the possibility for reference by their very existence, since trauma, by definition, needs an *a priori* world and a referential history from which it stems and the abreaction from trauma requires a narrative. With the poststructuralist notion of decentered subjectivity, Auster suggests the flaws in assuming the condition as the norm. By showing how the self can indeed be centered in relation to others and to the outer world, he states by implication that the poststructuralist condition is a defect of nature and parallels it with trauma as a harmful state that can be overcome. Auster's use of metaphor and metonymy in signification demonstrates how, even after acknowledging the figurativeness of all signification, a momentary and context-bound reference to reality is still possible.

The main difference between autobiography and fiction, I have concluded, is as follows. Autobiographical narrative is constructed by forming one's own experience into a representation of a certain idea by choosing a collection of events and experiences that demonstrate the chosen context, thus inevitably fictionalizing one's life to some degree. Fictional narrative, in turn, is formed so as to present a more objective representation of a certain idea, to present a metaphorical coherent storyline in accordance to the chosen context. One's own experience inevitably

shapes this fictional formation and however metaphorical the narration, it is still liable to be read literally. Yet, it is mistaken to see autobiography and fiction as contrary genres. They are rather on a continuum that is formed from one's own experiences at one end and the workings of the imagination at the other. Each prose text requires both, and there can be no text that would purely represent either of the poles of the continuum.

While the theme of the absent father in Auster's works has been studied before, a comparative study of the autobiographical and fictional use of the same theme has not been extensively covered. Auster provides a fruitful ground for studying the difference between autobiography and fiction as he overtly employs the same themes throughout his oeuvre, which consists of both autobiographical and fictional works. Moreover, his works address the problematic binary between the genres, and his use of metafiction as well as blurring the line between the genres invite a closer study. Whereas I have only used the theme of the absent father in my comparative analysis of the interrelation between autobiography and fiction, a similar study could be conducted with any of the themes apparent both in his fiction and autobiography. One such theme could be the notion of coincidence, another could be asceticism, just to name a few. It would also be interesting to see whether a similar usage of a theoretical framework, when forming one's own experience into narrative form, can be detected in works of other authors as well.

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